Theme :—

DR. MAGINN,

WITH

A FEW VARIATIONS.

BY

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THEME :—

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I suppose everybody here knows whom Thackeray meant when he spoke of Shandon "the learned and thriftless, the witty and unwise." Under the thin disguise of a name clearly identified with Cork, the author of "Pendennis" depicts the remarkable scholar, critic, and wit, Dr. Maginn.

According to a recent biography of the Doctor, Thackeray was kind to him and in a very substantial fashion. Evidently he used to visit him in prison and took stock of his behaviour, his vices, his follies and his amiability: and in the end he made wonderful copy out of him. Perhaps it would not be fair to the great author to suspect him of a deliberate adoption of the arts of the penny-a-liner. There was a long interval between the actual visits of Thackeray to Maginn's prison and the production of the sketches, literary and pictorial, which adorned "Pendennis." Very likely it was rather out of genuine sympathy and kindness of heart that Thackeray's visits were made to the Fleet, and that the drawings of Maginn as Capt. Shandon were an after thought, an effect of reminiscence such as is not uncommon among writers.

p53514

I prefer indeed to believe this, for, though I look upon Thackeray as one who has done considerable injury to Irish reputation by the truth, partial as it is, which is to be found in his delineations of the people of this country, I am satisfied that there was a generous side to his nature, and that what we complain of was less the result of national dislike than his tendency to see mainly the whimsical and humorous side of things.

Whatever we may think on this point, he has bequeathed to us in "Pendennis" a likeness whose substantial accuracy, I fear, there is no ground for disputing. Follow him into the Fleet prison and behold the "Captain," as he calls him, in the room adorned and saddened by the presence of his loving, patient and confiding wife. "This faithful creature" says the hero of "Pendennis," "adored her husband, and thought him the best and cleverest, as indeed he was one of the kindest of men. Nothing ever seemed to disturb the sweetness of his temper: not debts: not duns: not misery: not the bottle: not his wife's unhappy position or his children's ruined welfare." And in illustration of this view of his character we are led to behold the Captain throwing off with rapid pen the prospectus of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, being rewarded by the publisher, who was to make a fortune out of the venture, with a five pound note, then, in shabby dressing-gown and slippers, struggling out through the dismal passages of the prison to spend the money thus earned in cards or drink, or in thoughtless gift to some friend of the moment more seedy than himself.

Many people will think perhaps that the clear identification of the subject of the sketches in "Pendennis" with Dr. Maginn overpassed the boundaries of the discretion usually observed by novelists in the relation of their supposed fictitious characters to real people. At all events it has put out of the question the kindly biographical habit of showing to posterity only the brighter aspects of the nature of a man whose life is supposed to be worthy of being written.

The recent biographer of Maginn, to whom I have alluded, drops all disguise and frankly confesses the poor Doctor's "weaknesses," as he describes them. But, indeed, it must be owned that the Doctor himself omitted no opportunity of trumpetting to the world the most conspicuous of the failings by which he was beset.

Maginn was above all things a scholar. Born in Cork—Marlborough Street, if anyone cares to know the exact locality—he entered Trinity College when only ten years old, and soon reached the head of his class. At an early age he returned to Cork to be engaged as classical teacher in his father's school, of which at twenty he had to assume full control in consequence of the death of the elder Maginn.

Even then, there is reason to suppose that the curious mixture of weakness, power, and goodness which marked his after life was foreshadowed. They were pretty rollicking times in Cork as elsewhere—perhaps a trifle more so than in other places—in the first quarter of the present century, and Maginn took his share in the prevalent joviality, yet this did not hinder him from

taking his degree of LL.D., at Trinity. But if he consumed the midnight oil he assuredly heard the chimes at midnight.

He taught his school, and, such was his reputation for ability, with marked success in earnings and prestige. He essayed literature, and felt within him the promptings to go out of his narrow sphere; and yet in order to maintain the family whom his father had left, he spent ten years gerund grinding before he flung himself as a competitor into the grand arena where the giants of those days were struggling. Even while in remote Cork he was able to get access to the columns of Blackwood's Magazine, and when he at last determined to go bodily into the literary market for the disposal of his wares, his work was not unknown.

Mr. Montague, the biographer to whom I recently referred, quotes the following account given by Maginn himself, of his first interview with the eminent publisher :—

> "I called at the shop in Prince's Street, and just as I was going in, I recollected that poor Dowden and Jennings, and one or two more in whose names I had written squibs for the magazine, were after writing very wicked notes to Blackwood demanding the author's address; so I had a clear stage for some sport. I asked if Mr. Blackwood could be seen, and was introduced to his private office. I made a rather formal bow, and, giving him a touch of the Cork brogue, said, "Ye're Mister Blackwood, I presume, sir?" "Yes, sir," was the answer, "at your service." "Be Gor, sir" said I, "if you were only at my service a week ago, you'd have saved me a journey; but, be my conscience, as I'm here I'm very glad entirely that you *are* at my service at last." "Pray, sir, may I ask," he said, "what can I do to oblige you, or how have I displeased you? Our establishment is very punctual in replying to all letters." "Sir, sir, listen to me now," I said; "there's some rascal in Cork—you know Cork, don't you?—Well, there's some blaguard

there after making use of my name in your old trump of a magazine; and I must know who he is." "Oh, sir," said Blackwood, "I deny your right to ask any such questions, and those requests cannot be granted without delay and consideration." "Consideration indeed," I cried, "Aren't you after writing to one Scott there?" "I really cannot answer you, sir." "Maybe its going to deny what you wrote you are. Maybe you'll deny this, and this, and this," said I, throwing a bundle of his letters on the table before him. "Maybe you'll say they're not to the man who writes for you; and maybe you'll say that I'm not the man himself."

The whole proceeding would not strike us now as being in the best taste, but I must confess I do not think that at any time good taste was one of the strong points in the poor Doctor's gifted mind. However this whimsical interview did not prevent the Blackwood firm entering into an arrangement with the facetious Corkonian.

When Maginn became a writer—and for long after—classical knowledge was in the ascendant, and education was based on acquaintance with the dead languages. It was necessary for a man of any pretensions to culture, not merely to understand Latin, but to be familiar with the most read of the authors. A speaker in the House of Commons was shouted at if he made use of a false quantity in a quotation. Jokes and puns were peculiarly appreciated, if they happened to be, as they probably for the most part were, in Latin. At that time, it was only for the benefit of the ladies that a translation of a classical passage was considered to be necessary. Now-a-days, as everyone knows, things are different, and perhaps before long it may be the sweet girl Bachelor who will have to do the rendering for the weaker sex.

Back in Maginn's days, the recent changes were scarcely foreseen, and Latin and Greek held their sway. Saturated from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot with the speech of the Ancients, he naturally took to exercises which were very popular amongst the learned, and turned all sorts of English, Scotch and Irish rhymes into Latin and Greek verse. But this was only one of his accomplishments. It helped to make him conspicuous amongst the wits with whom his work was associated, but there was scarcely a mode of the magazine writer in which he was not soon confessed a master.

He assumed for a great deal of his work the *nom-de-plume* of Ensign O'Doherty, commencing with a sketch of that warrior in which there are traits that may have given hints to the author of Barry Lindon. Under this title he poured forth essays, poems, sketches, paradoxical reviews, and humorous tales which were rewarded with universal applause. He is credited with having suggested the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* and with having written some of the most telling passages in that famous collection. I scarcely suppose many people would now try to disentangle them from the mass, as has been done with jealous care by the editor of John Wilson's works, who manifestly believed most of the collaborateurs of Christopher North were scarce worthy to figure alongside him. And, indeed, one can scarce wonder at his fastidiousness when we remember he tells us that the Shepherd, mainly the creation of his hero, in wisdom equals the Socrates of Plato and in humour surpasses the Falstaff of Shakespeare, might have stood against

Dr. Johnson in close and peremptory argument, and might have rivalled Burke in amplitude of declamation.

These *Noctes* fill many volumes, and very able pens have been employed on their composition. In their day they were, amongst the reading set, the object of boundless enthusiasm. But somehow they do not seem as the cant goes, "to catch on" now. There is a fashion in literature as in tunes and dresses and perfumes. We hear the air we used to rave about many golden years ago, and, even though it has not been ground on barrel organs, we wonder what we found in it to make us love it to folly. Good sound literary work does not lose its savour so quickly perhaps, but modes alter and tastes with them, and unless there be in the production some of that divine but rare spark, which alone can keep alight through the darkening influences of time, we are apt to prefer workmanship not really so good, opinions even more intolerant and ridiculous, dialect less true to nature, and slang yet more vulgar, provided they are all up to date.

And what is true of the *Noctes* in general is at least as true of what remains of Maginn. Yet his work is full of good things. Many of his productions do not please—even repel a good deal—but upon all there is a stamp of power. People would not much care now to read parodies of Christabel or of the Ancient Mariner, but in his versions there is a wild and reckless fun which must have been overpowering when all the admiration and opposition such poems excited were at their height. He was a master, too, of a grave sort of ridicule, and his solemn parallel between John Gilpin

and Mazeppa was of a kind to catch, and did effectually catch, the taste of the day.

I do not think that now-a-days his Bacchanalian strains would be tolerated. His thirst was omnivorous, and there is scarce any intoxicating liquor which he does not celebrate as if *con amore*. He does it in prose as well as in poetry, in solemn apothegm as decidedly as in his playfulness. Without disdaining any, however, he ostentatiously proclaims his preference for the humbler forms of liquid. There is really no affectation in the stanza,

"Let blank verse hero or Spenserian rhymer
Treat Donna Musa with Chateau-Margaux,
Chateau Lafitte, Johannisberg, Hochheimer,
In tall outlandish glasses, green and blue;
Thanks to my stars, myself a doggerel chimer
Have nothing with such costly tastes to do;
My muse is always kindest when I court her
O'er whisky punch, gin-twist, strong beer and porter."

To be sure it was the fashion of his time, and a pretty brisk consumption of fluids and tobacco is indicated throughout the *Noctes*, but I know of no writer who is so insistent, so vehement on this theme, and it is impossible not to think that his utterances were perfectly genuine expressions of feeling.

There are many passages in his writings which seem to suggest that, had he dedicated himself to serious poetry, he might have attained considerable success. I am, however, free to admit that there is nothing so illusory as speculation on possibilities discovered in fragmentary passages, however brilliant these may seem. What there is less reason to doubt, is that in criticism, especially of the controversial kind, Maginn might have

taken a high, if not the highest place. His learning was copious, comprising several modern languages in addition to classics; his reading deep and extensive, his memory powerful, his wit a sharp and strong weapon. In his day, reviewing was a rougher process than it is now, and literary disputes often resembled a boxing match—without gloves. In this department he was superb.

It must be confessed that at times one reads, with gentle condemnation of course, but all the same with delight, his assaults upon some of the Shakespeare critics. Even now, notwithstanding the undoubted gain derived from the labours of the commentators, some of them seem to cry aloud for castigation. It is but a short time since I read from one of those gentry, and in a high-class publication, a proposed emendation. There are not many passages amongst the humourists more pathetic—where pathos is usually most striking—than the Hostess's description of poor old Falstaff's death, when, as she said, the "King had killed his heart." "He babbled o' green fields," the good woman says. The improved reading suggested is, that he died on a table covered with green baize.

In disputes with persons of this vocation, it may be easily imagined that Maginn was in his glory. He takes up for example Dr. Farmer's Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare, which he begins by describing "as a piece of pedantic impertinence, not paralleled in literature." And if one be disposed to treat this statement as somewhat severe in style, the excuse is that the statement is true. The learned Doctor whom

Maginn attacks, was one of those who believed the fables about Shakespeare's holding horses, the Lucy incident, and all that, and maintained that he was a man without education, who, by force of natural genius, had accomplished works of art that remain the transcendant glory of the language in which they were produced. Maginn exposed all these absurdities with a powerful pen. His reply to Dr. Farmer contains a body of critical exposition which is so full, so profound, so generally admirable, that it is a subject to be regretted it was not thrown into the form of an independent treatise, instead of being a controversial assault upon a comparatively insignificant critic.

This was not, however, the most remarkable example of his "swashing blow." Grantley Berkeley wrote a novel and Maginn reviewed it. In dealing with the production, he did not confine himself within the limits criticism now generally acknowledges. He denounced the whole tribe of Berkeleys in language that might be rendered in the Latin motto, *nec fortis vir*, &c. He impeached the virtue of Grantley Berkeley's mother, and ascribed to the author all the immorality of disposition which the hero of the story exhibited. The reply of the offended romancer was, like the criticism, characteristic of the period. Berkeley and his brother appeared in the office of Fraser, the publisher of the magazine in which the article was printed, and though a man of delicate health and feeble frame, beat him savagely. Maginn avowed the authorship of the criticism and a duel followed. Three shots were exchanged without result. I do not feel quite sure that either of the

parties to the combat deserved to have got off so well. At all events it is not to be regretted that reviewing has lost something of the pungency it possessed when such incidents as these were possible.

Amongst the miscellanea Maginn was in the habit of throwing off, frequently in the midst of the wildest conviviality surrounding him, were short tales or sketches such as "The Man in the Bell," "Pococurante," and "'The last words of Charles Edwards, Esq." These, like his versification, hinted of the capacity to achieve important results in another line. But, as in the case of his versification, it would be idle to argue from comparative trifles—intense and vivid as they are—that he might have become great in fiction. Here, as indeed everywhere, he leaves the impression of one whose variety was almost a fatal gift.

The most brilliant, if also the most sad, years of his existence were passed away from his native country. I am not aware if he ever re-visited Ireland after having once quitted it and obtained his characteristic interview with Blackwood, but his local knowledge of the South, at least, was very considerable, and his memory of its peculiarities was perfect. He had sense enough never to attempt to divest himself of his nationality. On the contrary indeed, he put it ostentatiously forward, not merely in his assumption of the character of Morgan O'Doherty, Ensign and Adjutant, late of the 99th or King's Own Tipperary Regiment, but he heightened the effect of his writings continually by sallies of genuine broad Irish humour. And this Irish feeling was sufficiently strong in him to induce him to publish an earnest

denunciation of the trash which then passed current in England as Irish songs. Who does not remember them, Donnybrook Fair, Looney MacTwolter, and such like? His analysis of the rubbish was keen and discerning, but it occasionally merged into a strain more purely earnest.

He quotes from "another Irishman of Cockneyshire":—

> "—— Cormac O'Con
> Of the great Con grandsire
> the son of Combal the Greek, sire,
> Whose name sounded afar
> As great Ossian's papa."

And he adds this sentence: "If I met this fellow, who has our Irish names so glib at his fingers' ends, at the top of the highest house of the city, I should kick him down stairs." This is scarcely high class criticism, but probably Maginn would have pleaded that the offender would not understand any more refined form of censure. It is, however, a characteristic example of the lengths to which reviewing went when *Maga* and *Regina* were young.

The indignation of Maginn must not be mistaken for the fastidiousness of scholarship or high culture. He was as fond of the rollicking fun or genuine absurdity of real Irish productions as anyone Not only did he translate a part of the "Groves of Blarney" into Latin, but he actually wrote a poem in praise of the obscure author, who had followed in Cork his own old modest calling of Schoolmaster. The mock-heroic verses are only curious—not beautiful—but two or three of them may bear quoting:—

"Who—ask ye? No matter. This tongue shall not tell
O'er the board of oblivion the name of the bard:
Ne'er shall it be uttered but with the proud spell
That sheds on the perished their only reward.

Ah, no! look abroad, sir, the last of October,
In the pages of Blackwood that name shall be writ,
For Christopher's self be he tipsy or sober,
Was not more than his match, in wine, wisdom or wit.

Ye Dowdens and Jenningses, wits of Cork city,
Though mighty the heroes that chime in your song,
Effervescing and eloquent, more is the pity,
Ye forget the great poet of Blarney so long.

I mean not the second O'Fogarty hight
Who can speak for himself from his own native Helicon:
I sing of an elder in birth and in might,
(It is said with true deference) honest Dick Milliken."

It is needless to add that the ode winds up in the good old fashion and the goblets are asked to pay tribute to the memory of the poet. The filling of a bumper, indeed,

"Will cheer his sad ghost as it toddles along
Through Pluto's dark alleys in search of the joys
That were dear upon earth to this step-son of song."

There is, perhaps, nothing so difficult to explain satisfactorily as why the class of writing of which the "Groves of Blarney" is the capital example, should be found so amusing. I know no theory which exactly fits the case. The origin of the style of which so happy an example is furnished by Milliken is easily understood. For generations education consisted mainly of classics, and for the masses of Ireland it was rendered through *hedge* schoolmasters. These were in many cases the

actual authors of the curious mixtures of gods and polysyllables that composed our rural literature then. Such invocations as that to the Colleen Ruah were repeated throughout these works with very little variation, in the following style:—

"Are you Aurora or the goddess Flora
Or Euthernasia or Venus bright,
Or Helen fair beyond compare
That Paris stole from the Grecian's sight?
Thou fairest creature you have enslaved me,
I'm intoxicated by Cupid's clue,
Whose golden notes and infatuations
Deranged my ideas for you Colleen Ruah."

I can easily imagine a good many people of respectable intelligence and excellent reasoning capacity reading through the whole of the lengthy stanzas from which I have quoted without being able to comprehend what there was in them to raise a laugh, and yet to this day their incongruities and blunders are as successful, amongst us in Ireland at least, as those of Holofernes or Bully Bottom or Mrs. Malaprop's nice derangement of epitaphs.

The original compositions were penned in perfect good faith and received from the peasantry a tribute of genuine admiration. The style has been caught up, and to the present day some excellent specimens of the vein are produced. One of the most recent, I may quote from the pen of a friend from Cork, who, for many years poured forth anonymously, column after column of genuine wit and humour.

Chant of the Quay called Coal.

Were I sublimer than the Grecian rhymer,
  Than Pisistratus or bold Bonaparte;
Could I when lyrical, like Moore that miracle,
  Endue my dialect with tuneful art,
I'd pen a ditty of the beauteous city,
  So wise and witty 'twould beget renown,
And like thrush or curlew I'd extol that purlieu,
  The Coal Quay Market of my native town.

Near this fine centre, as one side you enter,
  You'll see the Bridewell, with police in rows,
And captured seamen and young ladies screaming,
  At the female searcher rummaging their clothes.
It's there the burglar must reside nocturnal
  In a gloomy dungeon running under ground,
With the Governor standing at his post commanding,
  In portly attitude surveying round.

O, that's the dwelling where 'tis easy telling
  If your sense of smelling is'nt up to snuff,
You'll find perfumes there from each flower that blooms there,
  That you'd want six noses for to scent enough:
'Tis there the sages of the learned ages
  Your sight engages upon each book-stand,
The rules of Voster, or great Paradise Lost, or
  The Comic Songster—all at second-hand.

'Tis there the animals in congregation
  Show great rotation, both the horse and hen,
With organ monkeys, and dogs, ducks, and donkeys,
  And Poor Law Guardians and grand Aldermen;
'Tis there all pleasure swings in jovial measure,
  While ballad-singers in full voice combine
With whispering lovers, and bold cattle-drovers
  A-reconnoit'ring their furtive swine.

Before long I hope to see the Author appearing to the public with a new work and under his own name. I shall be greatly astonished if his book detracts from the reputation of Irish humour.

Returning to Maginn, I may say it has not been my intention to make a critical and exhaustive analysis of the merits of his work. His place is tolerably settled. He remains amongst the men of letters whose productions will afford the casual reader a good deal of satisfaction when he takes them up, but who will probably, for the most part, be read only with a special purpose in view. Very possibly some scholar may take a look at them with interest for the sake of the clever Greek, Latin, and other versions of old ballads and poems of very modest merit, but it is not at all improbable that many more will be interested because of the fact that the poor originals might have been lost, or rendered less accessible, but for the learned embalming.

The fashion of composition in the classical languages is very old, but even when it was more natural than of late years, it is doubtful whether its results were really very valuable. Milton's Latin Poems do not count very much now in his attractions, or add much to his reputation, and so I might say of many another from his time to that of Maginn. He and his fellow-townsman Prout, were almost the last who earned distinction in this walk. Their productions, however, were very different in strain from the solemn sonnets of the author of Paradise Lost. They were generally light and airy in vein, very often downright parody. There is, no doubt, something piquant in the Friend of Humanity's speech done into Latin as he refuses sixpence to the weary knife-grinder, and kicks his machine to pieces, or in a polyglot version, Italian, French, Greek, and Latin of the "Groves of Blarney," the one furnished

by Maginn, the other by his colleague, the *soi-distant* "elderly clergyman from the bleak top of Watergrasshill." But as far as the latter is concerned, we fancy the old song will live and be remembered long after the remarkable translations of it have been forgotten.

One of the most grievous things we encounter in literature is the phenomenon of great gifts ending in mere futility. I have already guarded myself from attempting to pass judgment on the question whether if Maginn had been more ambitious, if he had not been content with a sort of higher class journey-work, but had aimed at artistic greatness, he would have achieved it. All that we actually know is that he did not make the attempt. No doubt, we learn, that he had, like most men of any activity of intellect, many large schemes which he never reduced to practice. In effect, he was, at the beginning, and remained, a magazine writer, filling the place which on the stage is known as a general utility man.

There was not, perhaps, much inducement to him to do otherwise, had he so preferred. He lived in an epoch which blazed with genius. He was the contemporary of those whose names light up the earlier period of this century with a brilliancy which in its day was dazzling, and even yet leaves a marvellous halo round it. He was a scholar and a wit equal to the best. But he was an Irishman truly racy of the soil. The days of his late manhood were mostly passed in Scotland or in England. He was as much at home in the broad Scotch dialect as he was in the ways of Ambrose's Tavern in Gabriel Road, Edinburgh, the

sometimes real and sometimes supposed scene of the *Noctes*. In cockneydom he moves with a knowledge of the kingdom which few born within the sound of Bow Bells could have surpassed. There is, no doubt, much education, of a sort, in a career where a man walks more often by night than by day, when one is not only familiar with West End houses and with the Temple, but has had the run of Covent Garden, has a face well known in many a tavern, and has been a graduate of the Fleet Prison.

These experiences did not convert Maginn into either a Scotchman or an Englishman. He remained with the marks of his nationality strong upon him and in him, yet what was his nation to him regarded as an abiding place? It is scarcely necessary for me to say he was not of the stuff out of which self-denying patriots are made. Of course he had his good points: all the amiable ones were his: but no one would ever dream of associating him with the cultivation of literature on a little oatmeal in the hope of helping the interests, or raising the estimate, of his native land. In Maginn's time Ireland was for the literary man a country to live out of. There is not much temptation to write where there is nobody to read. In the early part of the century, it must be remembered that three fourths of the nation were, so far as literature is concerned, deaf and dumb. The native tongue was a medium of speech still, but its written characters were as much a sealed book to the masses as were English letters. Of the language of the upper classes, the masses knew only so much as was required for ordinary every-day intercourse.

And so an author who chose to remain an Irishman by habitation, as well as by birth, had to content himself with few readers and very little pay.

Scotland, it may be said, was as poor a country as Ireland at that time, and still it produced great writers, and Edinburgh was a literary capital. True, Burns soared into fame from the plough. But think what sort of a ploughman he was. Read "the Cotter's Saturday Night," the typical picture of the household of a humble Lowland peasant, and it will be easily understood how it was possible to find even in Scotland an atmosphere in which a poet could obtain readers and maintain life. The people could read. That is one explanation of why Scotland maintained a race of great writers, whose works, received with enthusiasm at home, overflowed their national boundaries and became favourites of the English speaking race.

In Ireland we have, as it were, to take up anew the task of cultivating literature. Of course we can boast of names distinguished and even eminent, but our bead roll hardly seems bright in proportion to the admittedly high average of intelligence amongst our people. With the cultivation of that intelligence I venture to hope that the standard may be universally raised, and that our best products will be higher in proportion to the level above which they have to lift themselves, in order to obtain eminence. I content myself with hoping : I do not venture to prophesy.

But it is not in a despondent spirit I address myself to this aspect of the question. There is no reason why Ireland should not be the home of great literary and

artistic work. Her past reaches, dimly indeed but perceptibly, into antiquity so great as almost to suggest geologic rather than historical periods, and over all that time there pass shadowy forms that might well give inspiration to the poet. The surface of the land at almost every mile is suggestive of picture, of song, and of story. Think of the raths and all the conjecture and mystery they suggest. Our poverty as a nation is, in a sense, artistic wealth. Moving through Ireland we are marching amongst ruins. The saying that "an Englishman's house is his castle," was, at one time, literally true of the Irishman. A few centuries ago, in the rural parts, every house worthy of the name, actually *was* a castle. It was built not merely for shelter but for defence. These half-demolished fabrics stare us in the face whithersoever we turn, whether on the hill, the bog, the meadow, or the seashore. Grim chronicles must cling to these battered walls if only the perception were there to decipher them: stirring scenes might easily be pictured while gazing through the holes that once were windows.

Nor is the shore less suggestive. On Cape Clear I have often stood and gazed from the top of the smooth wall of cliff two hundred feet high, upon what remains of Dhun-an-Ore, the abode of Phelim the Rover, and thought that, had he been other than an Irishman, his fortunes would have found more ample chronicle than they have yet received even in Joyce's spirited lines. And on that spot, looking away over the great "Western Ocean," as the Capers always speak of the Atlantic, or Southward in the direction of France and Spain, one cannot help thinking thoughts that some suitable brain might weave into lofty poetry.

Irish thought, indeed, has not been altogether negligent of them. We have had the chant of "the Wild Geese," and I remember the lines, coming from the West,

"They are flying, flying like Northern birds over the sea for fear,
They cannot abide in their own green land but seek a resting here."

But what has been done is too little for an almost inexhaustible theme.

We live in a country which O'Connell used to apostrophise as the land of the green valley and the rushing river. On every side, and in every aspect, it is full of suggestion. By the bog-land or on the bare mountain we can hear echoes of the wail of hunger, or the fierce cry of hatred and crime. In how many of the passes amongst the hills does it not seem to us that we can find the echo of long forgotten battles, and the dint of steel upon steel?

But for literary and artistic work, beyond all the marvels of her skies, the terrors of her cliffs, the thunder of the beach, the desolation of the bog-land, the supreme stuff is the Irish people. From under the pressure of dismal centuries, enough to embrutify any but the highest races, they have emerged, not without traces of what they have undergone, but retaining all the brightness, all the vivacity, all the variety of the loftier order of manhood. "The Irish Peasant," says a modern writer, "is by no means the merry fellow he is popularly supposed to be; on the contrary, he is gloomy and dejected." And within the author's sphere of vision she speaks something like the truth. There are parts

of the country where a laugh seems as rare as anything to laugh at, except at the wrong side of the mouth. Yet, even here, there is not the uniform dullness of stolidity. We have lately seen the short and simple annals of the poor, who are squatted in one of the dreariest reaches from bog to mountain of Connemara, transformed into idylls as touching as those which treated of shepherds and shepherdesses in those summer lands, where dwelt, to use Kenealy's lines,

"The heathen goddesses
That wore no bodices
But ran stark naked through Greece long ago."

In the Irish people the Irish writer can find a theme at least as varied and attractive as the Scottish writers for generations have found, and to this day still find, in the Scottish people.

The ablest delineations of English rustic life have depicted the labouring classes, as rendered by their condition, dull almost as the cattle they tend. Who can forget George Elliot's term "bovine" as applied to the groups of rustics she describes? And yet the keen eye of art can see distinctions under those uniform surfaces—the gleam of humour, the play of passion, the germs of tragedy. In Ireland it is not necessary to dig so deep in the peasant stratum to find the rich material for artistic presentation. It crops out to the surface. The monotony of lonely toil with decent conditions, which has made the Englishman the inarticulate creature he is described, has not been the lot of his Irish brother. The Irishman has generally gone one degree lower in

the scale of material well-being, and where the other has had bare necessaries, he has entered into the region of dire suffering.

Throughout the whole range of existence the emotional pitch in Ireland is higher. The great perturbation of an English village arises from a poaching affray, or a strike; in Ireland the outbursts, when they do occur, are wilder, wider, more calculated to send a thrill not alone through the whole land but far outside it. Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," though not named, was, when the poem was written, easily located. If it appeared now, for the first time, it would not be quite so simple. A plausible claim might be made for hundreds of originals. Numerous as are the delapidated castles, still more numerous are the roofless structures which once were peasant dwellings.

I am not now talking for or against political economy, or indeed for or against anybody or anything. I am merely pointing to a condition of things, which like a storm, a shipwreck, a flood, or a conflagration may be regarded as a storehouse of emotion, such as art pants for. In the story of the "Sea divided Gael," what wealth is there of narrative, of raw material for poetry. How many times has it embraced wilder wanderings than those of Ulysses, stories as beautiful as that of Hermann and Dorothea, quests as sorrowful as that of Evangeline?

Perhaps in no country of the world has there ever been so often experienced, so profoundly felt, so long and keenly remembered, the separation of kindred,

the wrench of mother from son, of father from daughter, of husband from wife and children. And, let me say, that in a sordid, material age, when the rage for money-getting has banished old world chivalry, has sapped the power of greatness, and in countries once illustrious by the virtues of their public men has put baseness into high places; in an age when the millionaire is worshipped no matter how the pedestal on which he stands may have been manufactured—there is in the stream of liberality ever flowing across the Atlantic, eastward, towards the humble Irish home, in that bounteous giving, with both hands, to dear ones left behind, all that could be spared from earnings gained by unequalled toil, a something which may make many a theme for the student of nature as glorious and as touching as was ever presented in the history of any people.

But addressing an audience such as I have the honour to appear before this evening, it is scarcely for me to point out the paths by which the artistic mind may reach to the eminence it ambitions. I am no guide. I can give little more aid than to say "go on and prosper," and shout with honest congratulation when the height has been scaled. The points which I have indicated as stimulant to the creative power of intellect are none of them new, indeed are all, I fancy, of the most obvious kind. They have been appreciated and have urged of late new and aspiring spirits to exertion. I feel that I am, if I might so say, spurring a willing steed. I halloo on those who are actually running an eager race. But the generous striver does not disdain the cheer of the humble partisan, and I

trust that those who are now doing good work in the effort to give new vitality to Irish literature, may not regard me as offering too much of that most obnoxious article—at least in literature—good advice. At all events, I want the crowd, who are, like myself, outside the ropes, to cheer with me for those who are doing their noble best to re-create the reputation of Irish letters. They are earnest, they are able, they are appreciative. Their work has already made its mark on the minds of the reading public—not in this country only—and its influence will, I hope, percolate downwards to the less thoughtful, and less learned amongst us. Ancient Ireland has once again, in her shadowy robes, risen bodily before us in the New Library. The fairies that were banished, or forgotten, have renewed their pranks, mischevious or benevolent. Self-sacrifice for the good of others, has found expression with a weird quaintness, which belongs, perhaps, to a new foreign school, but which is none the less Irish in its suggestive and mystic style. In every direction—prose, poetry, the drama, the fresh Irish intellect has been at work, and its manifold results have been a source of present rejoicing, and of hope for the future. Not narrowed by patriotism degraded into provincialism, not wanting in appreciation of what is great in the tongues of other countries, or the character of other peoples, I hope to see the new movement which has taken place amongst Irish writers quicken into a glorious and lasting life for Irish literature.

Appendix.

On the appearance of the summarised version of this lecture in the newspapers, I received a communication from a clergyman, nephew to Dr. Maginn, intended "to correct a few inaccuracies," and as it would appear also to present a different view of his personal character, I append the letter. Whatever may be the judgment on the question whether my correspondent's view or that of Maginn's contemporaries be well founded, my readers will doubtless be glad of the opportunity of seeing Kenealy's warm-hearted and eloquent tribute to the memory of the friend he loved so deeply and tended so generously.

"In the first place, he was *not* born in Marlborough Street, but in Dean Street, in one of the high houses facing the gate leading to the Cathedral Library. Afterwards they migrated to Marlborough Street. I possess a Latin Grammar by his father, (my grandfather), John Maginn, published in 1812 by Edwards and Savage, 6, Castle Street, Cork, in which are given the names of the pupils of the school in that year.

With regard to his connection with Thackeray, Thackeray knew him well and intimately, did not make his acquaintance in prison, as seemed to be implied, knew his wife, daughters and sister, and speaking of the latter (my aunt Margaret), called her "Maginn in petticoats." My father, who was his younger brother by twenty years, always used to say that his failings were grossly exaggerated, particularly by Lockhart in his "Epitaph." And in corroboration of this I may mention that when I was in Edinburgh the year before last, a well known man there, whose father had much connection with my uncle, and with Sir Walter Scott, told me that the latter was in the habit of speaking of his son-in-law, Lockhart, with reference to his caustic tongue and pen, as 'that blackguard Lockhart.'

As to his financial difficulties, and his being in the Fleet in consequence, it is due to his memory, that what I have repeatedly heard my father state should be publicly known, viz., that these difficulties were brought about by lending his name as security. He was of a very hospitable and genial nature, kept a good house in London, which was ever open to Corkmen, whom he pushed by introductions, and by any other way in his power. As to his extravagance, he was a devoted father, spent largely and freely on the education of his family. One of his daughters was one of Sir Julius Benedict's most gifted pupils.

Love of the bottle and praise of it was the fashion of the age, and, no doubt, he shared the taste of the day. It was also the fashion to write songs in favour of wine and favourite drinks. But I do not see the conclusiveness of what Horace says of Homer, "Laudibus arguitur vini vinosus Homerus."

At any rate in my uncle's case, not *too* fond, as is proved by his splendid intellect and genius remaining unimpaired to the last. He wrote to the day of his death, and with no falling off. His fellow-countrymen are ready to acknowledge his genius, but I would prefer that they should venerate his character, and judge him rightly.

Personally, of course, I cannot speak, having being born 17 years after his death, but I quote from Dr. Kenealy (of Tichborne notoriety),—"The character of Maginn, while he lived, was but little understood; and now that he is dead, we hope it will not be misrepresented. Yet rarely has a man of such exalted genius passed from among us without winning that universal celebrity which he so eminently deserved. This disadvantage was chiefly owing to his having confined the labours of his mind to periodical literature alone; but in that department who so brightly shone as he? . . . . Pronounced by a high and amiable authority (Dr. Moir—the far famed *Delta* of Blackwood), 'abler than Coleridge,' he lived without attaining the fame of that extraordinary man; declared by another deep and intellectual observer of his character (Dr. Macnish) to be "quite equal to Swift," he never achieved the authority in literature, or the renown that mantled round the head of St. Patrick's Dean. But, great, indeed, and illustrious must have been the genius, which could thus secure the eulogy of two men whose opinions must carry with them respect and consideration, and whose abilities and virtues vouch for the value and the sincerity of their sentiments. . . . .

The first and chief attribute of his mind was its originality. The works of no distinguished man, within our own reading at least, display the same vein of thought and style. There is scarcely a subject on which he has written that he has not treated in a new manner, illuminating the grave by the liveliness of his fancy, colouring the witty by the solidity of his judgment, for he possessed both in an extraordinary degree, and his mind resembled a mine of gold, curiously prankt on the surface with flowers, but truly valuable within.

Nor was his genius acquired by long and patient study; on the contrary, it beamed very beautifully in his earliest years—the fair aurora of his future brilliancy. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, in his tenth year, and was a Doctor of Laws in his twenty-fifth—a precocity rivalled but by that of Wolsey, who was a Bachelor when only fourteen. And though his reading was immense, no man was less of a copyist of other men's thoughts, a stealer of other men's fire, than William Maginn.

His memory was the strongest in the world, and was a rich storehouse of all learning, so that he might with propriety be called, like the sublime Longinus, 'the living library'. Often when in want of some scholastic illustration for our own writings, have we applied to him, and never did we ask in vain. Quotations the most apposite; episodes the most befitting; obscure points of literary history, an elucidation of which we had ineffectually hunted for; sketches of minor literary men of other lands, the difficulty of finding which, those conversant with such studies alone can appreciate; stray lines and sentences from authors read only once in a century, and quoted but as curiosities: parallel passages in the Greek and Latin and Italian and German authors:—all these he could refer to without a moment's deliberation, as easily as if they had formed the business of his whole life. And yet, like Scott, no eye ever saw him reading. He seemed a perfectly idle man, and knowledge to come to him by intuition.

His erudition was without pedantry—his mind had no dogmatism. The αυτος εφα of the Greek sage did not enter into any of his opinions, which were never put forth in conversation but with the most singular modesty. He would talk to you like a little child on the most learned subjects; and whenever he advanced a sentiment, he would turn to his hearer with an appealing look, as if he distrusted his own judgment, and would not willingly mislead another's. We have seen him listen attentively to the speculations of a boy; gently correcting him when he was wrong, and when he was right entering with alacrity into the spirit of his views, but always more anxious to hear another speak than himself. We do not think he ever uttered a sophism in his life, but was an eager inquirer after truth; and his investigations were like those of another illustrious student,—αει φιλεοντα θεμιστας who ever loved justice. His sense of honour was heroic; and he adhered, like Sheridan, inflexibly to his principles, though they did not meet those rewards on which he might well have calculated. The devotion with which he loved his children is well known, and the memory of it is painted on their hearts. . . .

His poetry was of the highest order of humour—far superior to Swift, and entirely exempt from his grossness and impurity.

Not a single line did he ever write, which dying, he might have wished to blot; not a single obscene thought can be discerned in the whole range of his compositions, poetical or in prose. The wildness of his wit was well known; but his muse was always decent, and never arrayed herself in the immodest *peplos* in which some of our modern authors have shown her.

His theological knowledge was extensive. He had deeply studied the ecclesiastical writers, and spoke of Hooker and Barrow with rapture. Never lived a man impressed with a more humble

sense of his own failings, or with a finer veneration of our great Creator. He entertained for mankind an enlarged and bewitching love, and, conscious of human frailty, never spoke severely of their errors, but always in charity. He did not hold himself aloof from his kind with the sullen dignity of other eccentric spirits, but mingled with them with the careless, familiar ease of Fielding, or Fox, or Goldsmith, and would share in the noisy sports of younger men as if he were a boy himself, and not the rival of Swift in all true greatness, and infinitely beyond him in every private trait deserving of our love. His works, when they are collected, will form an imperishable monument of his mind; but his genius though splendid, was the least of his qualifications; and the writer of this notice can declare, that he valued more the kind and gentle heart of his deceased friend than all the glories of his intellect or the dazzling brightness of his fancy."

Highly as I too esteem his gifts of mind, I value more those of his character and heart, which I hope this letter may help to vindicate.

C. A. MAGINN,

Clonfert Rectory,

Newmarket,

Co. Cork.

7th February, 1895.

In a second letter, dated 18th February, 1895, the writer says:—

"I have a Memoir of Dr. Maginn in preparation, and also contemplate the editing some of the best fruits of his genius in as cheap a form as possible, in a single moderate sized volume."

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